

Partnering vs. MiTT

A New Way Forward

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## **Partnering vs. MITT**

### **A New Way Forward**

For the past seven and a half years the Global War on Terror has presented situations and events that have required the United States Armed Forces to rapidly adapt their tactics, techniques and procedures in order to accomplish the mission. One of the greatest of these challenges has been the necessity to create and train large host nation armies after the removal of a hostile regime. While the U.S. Special Forces (SF) is and has been the premier organization for this type of mission, the sheer size of the forces that now require training dwarfs the SF's organic capabilities. The solution has been the creation of military transition teams or MiTTs. These teams have made great progress in training and organizing the new Iraqi and Afghani Armies, but they lack the necessary assets to facilitate the rapid and successful creation of a host nation army. While the traditional MiTTs have and will always have a place on the modern battlefield, the large scale training and handling of host nation armed forces is best accomplished utilizing U.S. brigades or battalions in a partnership roles not the standard MiTT approach. Partnership not only alleviates

many of the critical weaknesses of the standard MiTT concept, it creates a more highly trained host nation organization, maximizes the strengths of both the U.S. and host unit, it is more cost effective as well.

### **The Standard MiTT**

Military transition teams are 10 to 20 man teams selected within the services and specially trained at Ft. Reilly Kansas for 4-6 months prior to deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan. The transition team's primary purpose is to coach, council, mentor, and teach a host nation brigade or battalion.<sup>1</sup> The MiTT usually has no assigned battlespace and operates within the area of operations of a sister U.S. unit (or units). This creates several issues with the chain of command, as combatant commanders view the MiTT teams as subordinate to them, while the MiTTs are reporting to completely different chains of command and receives contradictory orders in many cases on how to proceed with the training of the host nation unit. The lack of a unified command and control structure was highlighted by one MiTT commander's comments in his after actions report of his tour:

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<sup>1</sup> General David Petraeus, Memorandum for Iraqi Security Force Transition Team Members , 08 May 2007, URL:<<http://www.riley.army.mil/%7Bdyn.file%7D/8900e58c3603467eb609a8f82f514af8/GEN%20Petraeus%20-%20Commander's%20Guidance%20and%20Expectations.pdf>> accessed 03 January 2009.

I worked with four separate coalition brigade combat teams, seven different coalition battalions, several different units of the Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi National Police (NP) and an SF-ODA Team or two.<sup>2</sup>

The MiTT is capable of being easily manned, resourced and trained, then rapidly pushed forward to begin the training of a host nation military. Members of the MiTT are specially trained in the host nations culture, training techniques, weapon systems, and rudimentary language. They are staffed with officers and Soldiers who volunteer for the duty or are selected to fill the billets. The primary positions of a MiTT are the following:

- Team Chief - Major
- Logistics Trainer - Major
- Intelligence Trainer - Major
- Fires/Effects Trainer - Captain
- HSC Trainer - Captain
- Maneuver Trainer - Captain
- Communications NCO - Sergeant First Class
- Fires/Effects NCO - Sergeant First Class
- Intelligence NCO - Sergeant First Class
- Medic - Staff Sergeant
- Logistics NCO - Staff Sergeant<sup>3</sup>

Once in country MiTT teams operate by targeting the key members of the host nation unit: commanders, primary staff officers, platoon leaders, and senior NCO's. MiTTs concentrate on creating an operational force utilizing a

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<sup>2</sup> Major David Voorhies. MiTT Happens: Insight into Advising the Iraqi Army. *Combined Arms Tactics Directorate*, USAIC Ft Benning GA 20 April 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Fort Riley Official Transition Team Website, URL: <<http://www.riley.army.mil/units/trainingteam.aspx>>, accessed 10DEC 2008.

top down approach. Due to the small size of the MiTT, training done on the ground level, with the *jundis* (Privates) and *sariefs* (non commissioned officers) is conducted in large groups with only a handful of U.S. trainers providing oversight. During operations off base the MiTT usually operates with four - M1114 uparmored Humvees and 10-20 personnel, broken down into 8-9 personnel that stay with the vehicles (gunners, drivers, and an NCO in charge) and 3-12 dismounts depending on the mission. The dismounts concentrate on developing the key leaders and positions of the patrol/operation (commander, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants), as well as coordinate supporting fires and other U.S. assets as necessary. This breakdown utilizes almost all of the personnel of the MiTT, making simultaneous operations impossible and follow on missions to exploit any successes severely taxing for the standard MiTT.

### **Partnering - Maximizing Strengths**

Partnering places a United States Army battalion or brigade task force with a host nation army brigade or division. The U.S. unit brings all of its organic personnel and assets plus any additional units needed to accomplish the mission. An example of the task

organization of a partnership was between TF 2-15 2 BCT 10th MTN Div and the 4/6 Iraqi Army. TF 2-15 consisted of two line batteries, headquarters battery, and a support company. Attached was also an MP company (to train the local Iraqi Police), EOD team, and a civil affairs team, bringing the total number of U.S. personnel to 576.<sup>4</sup> The two line batteries were designated as the advisors and joint partners to Iraqi Army battalions. The U.S. battalion commander became the primary liaison and advisor for the Iraqi Army brigade commander while the company commanders became the counterparts of the Iraqi Army battalion commanders. The U.S. primary staff (S-Shop) members also paired up with their I.A. counterparts, so the planners, intelligence, operations, and administrative officers and staffs all had an American/IA counterpart.

Perhaps even more valuable, was that each U.S. staff brought NCOs that were subject matter experts in their given fields. These NCOs were capable of directly influencing the IA soldiers working in the S-Shops, often on a one-on-one basis. These staff relationships could continue despite fluctuations in the operations tempo since they were not required to become part of the maneuver element every time the unit left the wire. These

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<sup>4</sup> Major Mathew Zimmerman, Task Force 2-15 Field Artillery Deployment Summary, 29 OCT 07 p.4

relationships also helped to lessen the sometimes difficult obstacle of the personality driven leadership in foreign armies, allowing the development of subordinates even if the host nation commander or staff officer was weak.

Partnering provides a much greater teacher to student ratio of U.S to host nation soldiers. During the TF 2-15 and 4/6 IA partnership a group of 30 I.A. soldiers would typically have 15 to 20 U.S. soldiers present to facilitate training. This additional "face time" with each Iraqi trainee greatly increased his tactical abilities and self confidence once outside the wire. The additional manpower brought by the partnership also allowed over 17 specialty schools to be created, to include:

- Armorer Course
- Basic Route Clearance
- Basic Training Course
- Communications Repair
- Cook School
- English Course
- Equipment Recovery
- IA Commando Course (Advanced Infantry Skills Training)
- Maintenance
- Mortar Training
- M16/M4 (familiarization and qualification)
- Officers Basic Course
- Officer Route Clearance
- Personnel Training
- Sniper School
- Supply Course
- Warrior Leaders Course

Over 860 Iraqi Army soldiers were trained in these schools, learning skill sets and gaining proficiencies that



would otherwise have been unavailable to them had a regular MiTT been charged with their training.<sup>5</sup>

### **Partnering - Minimizing Weaknesses**

Partnering gives the U.S. BN or BDE the ability to have a significant U.S. presence on operations and out on patrols but still have the host nation army in the lead. This not only allows for all operations to have a definitive "Iraqi/Afghan face," it allows the host nation soldiers to see what "right looks like." During the TF 2-15 partnership, having Iraqi Army forces in the lead utilized their natural ability to successfully locate and identify improvised explosive devices prior to their detonation. The I.A.'s familiarity with the local area gave them a tremendous advantage to finding these weapons over the American forces. The Iraqi Army observers coupled with U.S. expert ordinance disposal (EOD) assets severely hindered the enemy's ability to target coalition forces successfully with these devices.

The breakdown of the partnership also succeeds in addressing one of the most frequent complaints about U.S. forces in hostile territories. By nature it forces the U.S. units out of the large bases and integrates them with

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<sup>5</sup> Zimmerman, 25

the local populace and host nation army. This makes the relationships between the units and local populace much less difficult to establish and maintain.

### **Fiscal Benefits**

Partnering is not only more cost effective, but it also provides a much more robust fighting force than the standard MiTT approach. Prior to the partnership between TF 2-15 and 4/6 IA the area of operations had three standard MiTT Teams and a U.S. Army battalion located inside and operating inside the battlespace. After the partnership 4/6 IA was assigned responsibility of the AO. TF 2-15 assumed responsibility for coordinating joint assets, facilitating communications, and advising the I.A. on security and C2. This breakdown removed the necessity of three MiTT teams and allowed a single U.S. Army battalion to assume oversight of a much larger area of responsibility than what it would normally be capable of.

One of the greatest fiscal benefits is that partnering reduces the need for officers and senior NCOs to be taken out of their functional areas to conduct MiTT tours. A large number of individual augments are not needed in a partnership because the U.S. BN or BDE has enough NCO's and officers present in their primary MOS positions organic

within the unit to facilitate almost any mission or training required by a host nation unit. Thus partnering would greatly reduce the already tenuous strain on officers (particularly post command course captains and junior majors) who are typically having to fill MiTT positions. These officers could go to brigade combat teams and operate within their functional areas, relieving the manning issues with the BCTs and allowing the officers the ability to pursue a standard career path.

### **Counterarguments**

The partnership method is, however, not without its opponents. At first glance, training a U.S. Battalion or Brigade for a non-standard mission seems to be much more difficult and resource intensive than training a standard MiTT, however, the training facilities already in present at JRTC and NTC are more than capable of adapting to training a unit for a partnership role. The training center at Fort Reilly can be used to train company grade and above officers and key NCO's much in the same way as one attends Airborne or Air Assault schools.

Another strong argument against partnering is the belief that it will require a dramatic paradigm shift in U.S. maneuver units to abandon the role of "door kicker"

and assume the role of supporting or advisory unit to a foreign ally that does not always see American doctrine as the best way to proceed. The transition from kinetic operations to non-kinetic operations is something that all units are going to have to address whether they are operating with host nation forces or acting alone. The presence of a host nation unit does in fact produce more friction with almost every operation , but this is easily mitigated by the liberal application of tactical patience, cultural understanding, and flexibility. It is difficult to adapt to another countries techniques, tactics, and procedures but it is by no means impossible. It will simply require a maturity of command that needs to be looked for specifically and bred in future officers.

Perhaps the strongest argument against partnering is that they are most effective when used at the outset of the buildup of a host nation army. The closer the host nation army is to self-sufficiency, the lesser the need for a robust U.S. training and coordinating unit. Once the host nation army has reached a sufficient level, the original MITT approach or special forces would be best utilized to facilitate training. They would then concentrate on coordinating for assets and fires outside of the host

nations abilities but be removed from the everyday operations and training of the host nation army as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

While the traditional MiTTs have and will always have a place on the modern battlefield, the training and handling of host nation armed forces is best accomplished utilizing U.S. brigades or battalions in a partnership role. This partnership produces a more highly trained host nation unit, enhances the inherent strengths of both units while simultaneously minimizing the weaknesses, and ultimately requires less government resources than the traditional MITT concept. (Word Count 1,995)

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